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ABSTRACT

Noting that a series of mechanical rules created for pairing and placement of judges at the National Debate Tournament (NDT) may be useful in developing a computer program to pair tournaments, this paper focuses on the methods used to pair rounds at the NDT and also looks at some pairing options frequently employed by other debate tournaments. The first section of the paper describes the pairings and judge assignments for preset debate rounds. The second section describes the procedures for powermatching in the preliminary rounds, including odd and even round pairings and pairings for the eighth or final round, and judge placement for these rounds. The third section describes the pairings and judge placements for the elimination rounds. (KTH)

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Administering the National Debate Tournament: An Outline of the Powermatching and Judge Assignment Procedures

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The American Forensic Association sponsored National Debate Tournament (NDT) is probably the most closely examined tournament in the country. The procedures employed at the tournament, including the method of assigning judges, and format, are frequently discussed in committee meetings and at tournaments. Over a period of years, a series of mechanical rules have been created in pairing and placing judges at NDT. These rules may be useful in developing a computor program to pair tournaments.

While the focus of this paper will be on the methods used to pair rounds at the NDT, this paper will also mention some options for pairing rounds that have not, for a variety of reasons, been used at the NDT. Several of these options are frequently employed at other tournaments. The choice of what method to use in pairing rounds and assigning judges can have an important effect on the activity. The rules developed for the national debate tournament have evolved over a period of years in order to ensure a fair method of pairing rounds. The assumption behind the mechanical nature of

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many of these rules is that the decision about which teams should debate each other, with which set of judges, is best made prior to knowing what specific schools are involved. The decision about what type of power matching should be used, or what judge should be assigned to a round is decided, in theory, before the tournament begins. These choices reflect a view of the fairest way to pair a tournament.[1]

I. Pre-set Rounds

A. Pairings. The general rules for the National Debate Tournament are outlined in the "Standing Rules for the Operation of the National Tournament," especially Rule V: Tournament Scheduling.[2] As with any tournament, the NDT begins with a preset round. Unlike other tournaments, only the first round is preset. The first round follows a high-low pairing, with the only restriction being that two schools from the same district cannot meet. If two teams from the same district are scheduled to meet, the tie breaking procedure discussed in IIA are used.

Other tournaments will have a larger number of pre-set rounds, ranging from three (probably the most common number) to eight (at some district tournaments). In scheduling these pre-set rounds, it is desirable to ensure that the level of competition be balanced; that is, that all teams face comparable levels of competition. Some tournaments, for example, arrange their schedule so that all teams are rated "A", "B", and "C", and all teams will meet one team from each category. When a category is uneven, some

borderline teams alternate between categories, acting as an A team for some teams and a B team for others, for example.

There are other considerations that might be useful in pairing preset rounds. The schedule might be arranged to ensure geographic diversity. It might be desirable to avoid pairing a team against the same school twice (although this restraint may be violated once the power match begins). Some tournaments schedule the pre set rounds so that all teams stay in the same building, and many tournaments attempt to keep all teams on one side of the bracket in the same room, at least in the even numbered round (this also acts as a double check on the sides of teams).

B. Judge Assignment. The judges for the first round are assigned randomly, with a few exceptions. First, obviously, no judge can hear his/her own team. Second, all judges are requested to turn in a conflict of interest form, and no judge can hear a team that is on that form. Third, if teams have turned in strike sheets, judges on that sheet will not be assigned to the team. Fourth, no team may be judged by a judge from their own district. Finally, no panel in round I can have two judges from the same district. If a tournament has more than one preset rounds, an additional constraint might be useful: no judge should be assigned to hear a team on the affirmative that his teams will later debate on the negative.

II. Powermatching in Preliminary Rounds

A. Pairing. The procedure used to powermatch rounds varies from round to

round. In all odd rounds except round I, teams are paired hi-hi; in even rounds they are paired Hi-low within bracket. While there is some dispute about the wisdom of hi-hi pairings,[3] in general it is thought that the combination of these two power matching methods provides the fairest method of pairing teams. A few tournaments may use lag powermatching (for example, powermatching round 5 based on the results of only the first three rounds), which might also use a combination of these two methods of pairing a round (in the above example, powering round 4 hi-hi based on the first three rounds and round 5 hi-low, also based on these three rounds).

After all the ballots have been collected, the team cards are double checked to ensure that the correct number of wins have been recorded. The total wins on all the team cards are added to ensure they total the total number of wins at the tournament. The cards are then placed in order. by win-loss record, ballots, and total speaker points (Standing rule V-A-2). Additional ties are broken by dropping hi-low points. Other tournaments may consider going to ranks as a further tie breaker, although this is not done at nationals). If there is still a tie, the tie is broken randomly. If a bye must be given due to an uneven number of teams, it would be useful to treat the bye as the lowest ranked team for the purpose of powermatching. There should be a card for the bye to ensure both an even distribution of the bye by side, and to ensure no team receives two byes.

Odd rounds: Hi-Hi The easiest pairings are the hi-hi rounds, without side constraints. All teams are ranked, in order,, based upon wins, ballots,, speaker points, and adjusted speaker points. (Other tournaments may wish to

use ranks, or may wish to break ties in order to ensure geographic diversity in pairing. It is also possible to break ties based upon the pre-tournament seeding of the teams.) Ties are broken randomly. Teams are then paired with 1 meeting 2, 3 meeting 4, and so on. The only constraints are that no team can meet another team twice, and no team can meet another team from its own school. If the "pure" pairing results in one of these pairings, we flip a coin to determine if the higher team should be moved up one debate, or down one debate. After this initial flip, all further ties are broken by alternatively moving the higher team either up or down in the bracket in the opposite direction of the previous adjustment. If this adjustment results in another impossible match, the team is moved one debate in the opposite direction. This process is continued until a possible match is found.

There is no side constraint in odd rounds. Prior to the round a coin is flipped to determine the side of the top seed team. All debates after that alternate between having the higher and lower seed team being affirmative (for example, if team 1 is affirmative, teams 4, 5, 8, 9, etc. will be affirmative). Other tournaments may wish to randomly decide the sides for <u>all</u> debates independently, or they may use a quartile system (having teams 1, 4, 5, 8, 9, 12, 13, 16 affirmative).

<u>Even rounds: Hi-low within brackets</u> In the even numbered rounds, we operate under side constraints; that is, teams that were affirmative the previous round will be negative the following round, and vice versa. These rounds are also paired hi-low within brackets; that is, theoretically the top team on one side of the bracket (determined by wins), meets the lowest team from the

opposite side of that same bracket. The major problem with this type of pairing occurs when the brackets are uneven (i.e., there are more teams with a given record on one side than on the other). In this case, the two brackets are made even by moving teams from the larger bracket to a lower bracket. There are three ways to even up the bracket.

The system used at NDT is to take the middle teams from the larger bracket and to move them down to the next lower bracket, keeping them on the same side. If there is a tie (for example, one team is needed from a bracket with an even number of teams), a coin is flipped to determine if the higher or lower team will be brought down to the lower bracket. (Some tournaments may wish to automatically drop the higher - or lower - middle team down to the next bracket.) After the initial flip, we alternate breaking ties for bracket between bringing the higher and lower teams down.

There are two other ways to break brackets. Some tournaments may want to bring the bottom teams of the higher bracket down to the next bracket. Other tournaments may wish to bring the top teams in the lower bracket up to the higher bracket.

Once the decision has been made to bring the team(s) down to the lower bracket, the upper brackets are paired, high-low. We then pair the lower brackets. At the NDT, in rounds 4, 6, and 8, the middle teams are placed in the lower bracket where they would be if they had one less win. The only limitation to this rule is that no team can be pulled down two brackets, if an alternative pairing is possible.

In round 2, this procedure is not used since it would place the upper bracket teams at the top of the lower bracket (since no 0-1 team can have 2 ballots), thus pairing the middle undefeated team with the team having the worst record in the tournament. Instead, the teams from the middle of the upper bracket are placed in the middle of the lower bracket. After this adjustment has been made, the lower bracket is evened up by dropping out the middle teams of the larger bracket (making sure no team is dropped a second bracket). The second bracket is then paired. This process is repeated for the other brackets.

As a doublecheck, it is useful to keep all of the teams that debated on one side in an odd numbered round in the same room the next round. This may also speed up the tournament.

Round VIII. The final round pairing presents some problems for the director of a tournament. NDT treats round VIII as if it were any other even round. Other tournaments may wish to treat it in a different manner. Some tournaments, for example, might wish to create a bracket with all the down two and down three teams, and to pair them against each other, and then to pair the upper rounds, if necessary pairing around the middle bracket so a down one team may hit a down four team. This method of pairing lets the down two and down three teams decide their own fate. There is some disagreement about whether the down two teams should hit other down two teams or if they should hit down three teams. In addition, it is unclear what to do if the middle bracket is uneven; should the top down two teams be given an easy draw (down four), or a hard draw (down one)?; should the bottom down three teams

be pulled up to hit a down one, or dropped down to hit a down four? There is little consensus concerning which of these pairings is superior.

B. Judge Placement. One of the most controversial aspect of the mechanics of the NDT is the placement of judges.[4] In the second round, judges are assigned as in round I. After that, a new procedure is used. At registration, all teams are asked to rank all judges at the tournament A, B, or C, (roughly 40% A, 30% B, 30% C). We attempt to give each team two "A" judges and one "B" judge in every round after II. This is done in the following manner.

Every judge is given a number. This number is coded as follows: The first digit indicates the district the judge represents. The second number indicates the school of the judge. The final letter identifies the specific judge. For example, judge 42 is the (sole) judge from the second school in district IV; judge 33c is the third judge from the third school in district III.

After a pairing is made, the tournament staff begins assigning judges. According to Standing Rule V-B-2, the following constraints are followed (in decreasing order of importance):

a. The Judge cannot hear a team from his/her school.

b. The judge shall not judge a team she/he has previously judged on the same side.

c. The judge shall not judge a team on his/her conflict of interest list.

d. The judge shall not judge a team s/he has heard on the opposite side.

e. A judge shall not judge a team on whose strike sheet s/he appears.

f. A judge shall not judge a team from his/her own district.

g. A judge shall not be assigned to a panel which has a previously assigned judge from his/her district.

h. The judge shall not be assigned in excess of the number of rounds which s/he is obliged to the tournament.

The last three requirements are occasionally violated. If constraint f. is violated, both teams involved will have a judge from their own district. This is avoided if at all possible.

The actual placing of judges is fairly mechanical. Initially, one individual glances at the individual debates and places the debates in order of the ease in placing judges (i.e., debates between teams that agree on the rating of most judges are assigned judges after debates between two schools that disagree on the rating of most judges).

Beginning in round five, those teams with four or more losses are automatically moved to the bottom of the pile and are assigned judges only after the judges for all other debates have been assigned. Once a team has lost four rounds, they are no longer guaranteed two A judges, although we attempt to provide them with two A judges if possible.

Judges are also ranked in ease of placement. Those that are easiest to place are assigned last. Those that are ranked A by only a few teams are used as soon as possible. In addition, while each team is given two A judges and a B judge, frequently we assign a judge who is ranked as an A by one team and B by the other, balancing the panel with a judge that is ranked a B by

the first team and an A by the second team.

Finally, we attempt to be careful with half judges, using only half of all available half judges per round (otherwise there is a danger of using all half judges during the first few rounds, creating a serious judge shortage in the last few rounds).

III. Elimination Rounds

A. Pairings. The pairings for elimination rounds are fairly simple. NDT uses the normal bracket:

1/16 vs. 8/9 =
5/12 vs. 4/13 =
=
3/14 vs 6/11 =
7/10 vs 2/15 =
=
=

The philosophy behind this bracket is that the top team will be paired against the lowest team, assuming the higher seed team wins. Thus, the total of the seeding ranks of the teams in a round will always equal n +1, where n is the number of the teams in the bracket. (Finals: 3, semis: 5, quarters: 9, octos: 17, Sextos: 33, triple octos: 65).

While NDT does not break brackets, other tournaments may wish to do so. In general, it would seem to be wisest to break brackets towards the center. For example, if 5 and 12 are from the same school, the 6/11 bracket would be

broken, and 5 would meet 11, 6 would meet 12. The winner would take the place of the higher seeded team (5/11 would hit 4/13). If the revised bracket creates another problem (5 and 11 are also from the same school, for example), the next pairing to be broken would be the one away from the middle, if possible (4/13), then two towards the middle (7/10), etc. If brackets are to be broken, they should be broken only when teams are actually scheduled to meet, not in octos based upon potential pairings in later rounds.

Seeding should be based on total wins, then ballots, adjusted points (some tournaments may wish to use total points, although NDT does not), and continued adjusted points (at NDT, up to the middle 12 ballots), and then a flip of the coin. (Standing Rule V-C-1) Other tournaments may wish to use ranks, opposition record, or other tie-breaking methods.

B. Judge Assignment. The assignment of judges in elimination rounds employs a grid. All judges are numbered, and the teams are then asked to strike up to fifteen judges and to approve thirty (or more) judges. (Standing Rule V-D-1) This information is placed on a grid, with the teams on one axis and the judges on the other. The number of judges that are mutually acceptable for each debate is then calculated and recorded. Then the number of debates each judge can hear as a mutual preference is also noted. Any judge that is a mutual preference for only one round is automatically placed in that round. After the singletons are placed, we go to the debates that still have no judges assigned, identify the debate for which there is the smallest number of mutual preferences, and then in that debate assign the judge with

the smallest number of debates in which he or she is mutually prefered. This procedure is repeated until all panels have one judge, then until all panels have two judges, and so on. While this is going on, the number of mutual preferences for each round is readjusted as each judge is assigned.

At this point, for those panels of less than eleven judges, we turn to judges that are prefered by one team, and neutral on the other team's list, balancing this with a judge that is prefered by the second team and neutral on the first team's strike sheet. Both teams should have the same number of prefered judges. If only one judge is needed to fill a panel, rather than use a judge that is prefered by one team and neutral for the other, we use judges that are neutral for both teams. (Standing Rule V-D-2-c). There is also an attempt to try to equalize the number of judges from the districts of the teams that are involved in the debate, but this sometimes conflicts with the desire to provide mutual preferences.

As judges leave the tournament, they need to be taken off the grid for quarters, semis, and finals.

Conclusion

The procedures used to pair and assign judges at NDT have evolved over a period of years to the point that they are relatively mechanical. There has been an attempt to remove discretion from the tournament staff in order to ensure the fair administration of the tournament. These procedures can easily be adapted to other tournaments and, because of their mechanical

nature, they could be computorized in order to promote an efficient tournament. This essay has attempted to identify the types of procedures that have been used at the NDT.

NOTES

[1]There are a number of books on running debate tournaments for those interested in other aspects of tournament management. See, for example, Paul Hunsinger, Donald R. Terry, and Roy V. Wood, Managing Forensic Tournaments (Skokie, Illinois: National Textbook Company, 1970; Wayne Brown and Penny Swisher, Directing Successful Speech Tournaments (Grandview, MO: Dale Publishing Co., 1980; and G. Thomas Goodnight and David Zarefsky, Forensic Tournaments: Planning and Administration (Skokie, Illinois: National Textbook Company, 1980.

See also Diana Prentice, Directing the High School Forensics Program (Lawrence, Kansas: Continuing Education, 1980), pp. 133-141; Marilyn J. Young, Coaching Debate (Clayton, Missouri: The Alan Company, 1975), pp. 62-78; and Don F. Faules, Richard D. Rieke, and Jack Rhodes, Directing Forensics (Denver, Colorado: Morton Publishing Company, 1978), pp. 255-298.

[2]"Standing Rules for the Operation of the National Tournament," January, 1985.

[3]Arthur W. Larson, "Preliminary Round Power-Matching: A Curious Double-Standard," paper presented at the Western States Speech Communication Association Convention, Honolulu, Hawaii, November, 1972. (ERIC # ED 071 108)

[4]Robert Trapp, "On Assigning Judges at the National Debate Tournament," paper presented at the Speech Communication Association Convention, Washington, D.C., December 2, 1977; Kathy Kellerman, Allan Louden, and

Michael Hazen. "Subjective Evaluation of Judges: An Analysis and Validation," paper presented at the Speech Communication Association Convention, Washington, D.C., November 4, 1978; James F. Klumpp, "Report on Judge Assignment Procedure at the National Tournament," Report prepared for the AFA Educational Practices Committee, November, 1980; and Warren D. Decker and John T. Morello, "Some Educational Difficulties Associated with Mutual Preference Debate Judging Systems, "Journal of the American Forensic Association, XX (Winter 1984), 154-161.